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GIFT OF
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*"Give me thy lips again
That I may swear my soul anew to thee."*

—Ronald.

*"O that I had a thousand hearts to give
Instead of one,
And were a goddess now,
Then heaven's lights would I pluck
To weave my lover's crown."*

—Beatrice.

LOVE'S HOLY HOUR

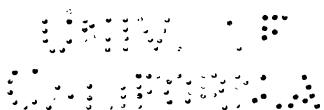
OR

The Sacred Betrothal of Ronald and Beatrice

A DRAMA OF THE WEDDING DAY

BY

NEANDER P. COOK



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1913

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LOVE'S HOLY HOUR

By NEANDER P. COOK

REVIEWS

This powerful drama of the wedding-day or evening is ostensibly founded upon a beautiful marriage ceremony. Between the various personages the whole story of human love is told from its first inception to its final consummation. It is remarkable that though since the beginning of time love has been the theme of poets and novelists alike, yet here an author should find an entirely new mine of the heart's emotions. Nearly all the characters are distinctly new literary creations. **Beatrice**, the heroine and bride, involuntarily suggesting Dante's beautiful guide through Paradise, so sweet and pure is she, loves not only ideally but so intensely and passionately, that she would pluck heaven's lights to weave her lover's crown. She has no equal anywhere in literature.

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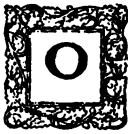
Then there is **Leonore**, the bride's mother, a heroine of whom the world never dreamt and hitherto unsung, but now she will never again be forgotten. Though a secondary character, she is yet almost more remarkable than Beatrice herself. Nowhere has the word motherhood breathed more fragrance than in this remarkable woman, whether it be in the pangs she secretly feels in growing older, or watching her daughter's nuptials, when she exclaims, "For that she has a mother, a bride knows not. Ah, woman never gives herself alone: her own and her mother's soul, both she strews at her lover's feet."

The book is unique in that it does not gain its power from the tragedy of love, but rather from its idealism. Its lovers are happy as if this were a sinless world and as if human passions were yet as unstained as in Paradise. The author portrays love as we hope it will yet be. He is distinctly the prophet of a new age. Yet so genuinely truthful and even realistic is the drama that

“Put off thy shoes
From off thy feet:
For the place whereon thou standest,
Is holy ground.”

—*Bible.*

PRAYER.

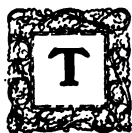


BRIDAL Hour,
Thou Holy Hour of Love:
Unfathomed Mystery
Of Life's Eternal Throb:
Grant to this Youth and Maiden
Their Prayer of Hope
And once again fill a Cup
With Eden's Bliss,
That, to the Heart's coy Trysting come,
Soul into Soul outpouring
They may drink,
Deep and full,
Creation's Morning-Kiss.

THE YOUTH
AND MAIDEN

LIFE'S SYMPHONY.

A Youth, a Maiden and a Kiss.



HEY walked together,
They talked together,
His voice grew soft,
Her heart beat loud.

Softer still his voice
Louder still her heart,
Then language failed:
A kiss—a conquered heart.
'Tis done:
The binding
That shall have no unwinding.

LOVE AND LIFE.

An Essay.

*"Sitting at the whirring loom of time
of the Infinite God,
The living garment weaving."*

—Goethe.

To the attentive observer of nature it soon becomes manifest that she has but one goal, viz., the superabundance of life: life in innumerable forms, in countless variations and endless ecstasies, a mantle covering completely the habitable sphere, penetrating every nook and cranny in earth and sea and air, pulsating and throbbing with miraculous intensity, the very self-realization of the Infinite God. It is a harp of a thousand chords, of whose music our joys and sorrows form component parts and counterparts, but who He is that sounds it according to His will, Him we know only from afar, for we are but the finite atoms of the Infinite Soul pouring itself forth in eternal strains.

Life is creative. It finds its fullest expression in a gradually advancing evolution through ceaseless self-renewal. All nature dies today in order that more triumphantly she may be re-born tomorrow. The old are passing on that there may be room for youth with new wooing days, so that life be not merely endless, but that immortality may run its course in a ceaseless nuptial kiss.

It is in her wedding raiment, love's springtime, that nature is most beautiful and divine. Life's greatest achievement is Love. The Bridal Wreath is creation's crown.

THE SACRED BETROTHAL OF RONALD AND BEATRICE.

Dramatis Personæ:

MOMUS, *God of Satire.*
AMOR, *God of Love.*
RONALD, KNIGHT OF OFTERDINGEN, *Bridegroom.*
BEATRICE, DAUGHTER TO LOTHAR, BARON OF ALT-
NACH, *Bride.*
LEONORE, *Mother to Beatrice.*
BRIDESMAIDS.
FLOWER-GIRLS.
BERTHELIND, ETHELRIED, ROSAMUND, *Sisters to Bea-
trice.*
RAGNI, *an Outcast.*
CUPID, *God of Love.*
The Heavenly Choir.
NAIAD AND NEREID, *Bridal Nymphs.*
CUNINA, *the Disconsolate Nymph of Heaven.*
THE FURIES.
HERA, *Goddess of Health.*
PRAYER OF THE UNBORN.
EUNICE, THE UNWOODED, *a Bridesmaid.*

Scene:

Castle Ofterdingen, in the Thuringian Forests, in part.
*The Elysian Regions in Heaven, in part. Fen-
salir, Temple of Immortality. Adnir, the Abode
of the Unborn.*

Time:

The Nuptial Day.

Period:

The Middle Ages.

PRELUDE.

Momus, god of satire.
Amor, god of love.

MOMUS (*satirically*), to Amor:

On virgin tongues,
O Amor, there goes a tale
Of two lovers,
Named Tristan and Isolde,
Which tale a riddle holds
I trow thou canst not solve.

Isolde was daughter to a king,
But Tristan not of royal blood.
And as ever hadst thou thy mischief wrought
That they who lawfully wed
Ne'er truly love:
Nor they that truly love
May at the altar plight their troth.
And as the statutes of mankind
Ofttimes asunder part
They whom the gods unite
To save the state's foundation,
It was decreed to break two hearts;
With sacred rite and legal pomp
The maiden was to another wed,
And Tristan to the desert banished.

But that night Isolde
Harnessed her snow-white doves,
Who with heaven's aid
To her lover carried her,
And then died of the desert-thirst.
'Twas more than three days' journey
Into the wilderness,
—So goes the tale—
And no other shelter there
Than in the stone the Minnegrotto cleft,
Yet three years
These lovers lived
Content and happy there,
And so witchingly each other loved
That their love
The hope of maidens is.

The Sacred Betrothal

Now tell me, thou gay deceiver,
Whence in the desert came their bread
And whence their drink?
For without temporal sustenance
Soon vanishes
Love's idle dream.

AMOR (*seriously*), to Momus:

O Momus, to sceptics such as thou
Truth opens not her silver mines.
The tale is true,
For where love is, there is no desert.
And what they ate and drank?—
The lovers on each other gazed:
The harvest of the eye
Was their food sufficient.
Each other's confidence
And openheartedness,
Which is the true bread
Of wedded souls,
These were the fruits they freely plucked.
So true their love,
So pure their hearts,
That sun and moon and stars
These trusting souls their favor showed.
It is no mystery:
Stony wastes are not love's limit
And plighted hearts from obstacles
Draw the relish of their feast.

INTERLUDE.

The Maiden and Her Trousseau.

A maiden singing:

*My heart is hopeful,
My heart is heavy,
My heart is singing,
My heart is dumb,
The flower once plucked
Can never bloom again.
Short is the morning-kiss
And long the day:
A two-fold meaning
Hath the bridal dress.*

of Ronald and Beatrice.

ACT I. BEATRICE.

Prolog.

'Twas a June day memorable:
The birds sang sweeter,
And the evening star shone brighter,
When Lord Ronald
The Lady Beatrice did wed:
For never gallant knight
A lovelier maiden
To her bridal consecration led.

BEATRICE'S FAREWELL TO HER TRYSTING-PLACE.

A copse near the castle on the Ofterdingen estate.

BEATRICE, *before donning her bridal garments, has absented herself from the festivities, to take farewell of her favorite trysting-place.*

For just once more,
For my last farewell,
—Before the ring forever
To another's will commits my happiness—
To thee, my faithful tree,
I flee.
Thou hast heard his pleading
And witnessed my consenting
Hast seen how bright and golden,
And jewel-studded, he showed the chain
By which to his authority
He is intent to shackle me,
Persuading me that bondage to him
Is greater freedom than my liberty.

The Sacred Betrothal

If it ever be
The bondage in his kisses,
In his endearing arms,
In love's unfailing rapture,
O then of iron
Let my bonds be wrought
But now, before the gate forever closes,
While yet my soul is mine,
Its virgin conscience writing-free,
Before I yield my all,
And plunge into the ransom-spurning deep,
O my guardian tree,
Tell me truly now:
Will his love endure?
His kisses last?
Steadfast his heart abide?
And his assurance never shadow throw?
For, O, if from that golden chain
The jewels drop,
And from his eye the love-light die,
And from his voice the mellow accent fade,
Then tongue can never tell
The anguish of my stricken heart.
Thou wert the sponsor of our troth,
Does the rustling of thy leaves
Dare to tell me eye to eye
That Ronald is a lover true,
A lover to the end?

* * *

So gently thy boughs bend low
And twine with the vine
To the graceless world
Undiscoloured to hold this bower mine.
I came upon this place when a child
I gathered blue-berries wild.
Here I sobbed my infant griefs,
Here I prayed my real prayers:
Did my penance,
And walked with God.
Here I built my castles of hope
And hid myself
For my prince to light upon me.
—My lover led I here,
And none, never none else.

of Ronald and Beatrice.

The voices of the bridesmaids are heard, calling the bride.

The maidens call me now.
O why so eager to prepare me captive?
A two-fold meaning hath the bridal dress.
I am willing, but there is time,
For anon, then, virgins, call in vain.
In my last leave-taking let me linger:
'Tis my girlhood's sanctuary
I must leave forever,
For the last hour my own,
Then his—
A consort?
Or passion's puppet?
Which?
Ah, me! Soothsaying never avails
When maiden-hopes
Their heart-strings anchor.

* * *

This is the place
Where Ronald the brave
Hath wooed me so gently and fiercely,
Wooed me as maiden loves to be wooed
By the tyrant-ruler of woman's heart.
This is the branch,
And this is the root
Where so often I made him sit.

* *

Thus his arms would round me steal,
Thus on his bosom I reclined,
Thus would he speak his love,
And thus he kissed my lips,
—Nectar such as angels never drank.—
How strong, how noble he is,
So fearless, so daring.
'Twas in yonder field,
Ethelried and I, daisies we sought,
When my father's mad steer he braved.
The awful horns I felt
Entangled in my dress.
Then Ronald's wild cry,
His terrible cry of war, I heard,
—How sweet to me the sound.—
He seized the beast
And choked the fuming nostrils.
O terrible the battle,

The Sacred Betrothal

Round and round they circled,
Great drops of sweat fell from his brow :
A groan, a mighty pull,
And awry was wrenched
The stiff neck of the brute.
But to me, how gentle he is,
Softly, as among downs,
I nestle in his strength,
And, as upon velvet,
I lay my cheek in his hands,
And gaze into the light of his eyes.
—O the happiness that here has been mine!
I watched him carve his name
Into the bark of the tree,
Then over it traced he mine :
Said he ever holds me above him.
And made a circle around both :
Said it was love's fortress,
As valiant knight he would for me defend.
Then from near my feet
He plucked violets
And twined them into my locks,
And pelted me with apple-blossoms,
And from yonder brook
Gathered forget-me-nots and buttercups,
And luscious berries out of the meadow
—With kisses between—he gave me to eat,
And seized me in his arms
And kissed me more.
So Ronald hath loved me here
As maiden was never loved before,
But, farewell, sweet trysting-place, fare-well :
The seal of my fate
Boldly I break.

AT THE CASTLE.

Ended is the wedding-banquet,
The merry crowd hath danced its last,
The boisterous guests departed :
The nuptial benediction
Ofterdingen's walls o'erspreads.
Bride and bridegroom the holy hour approach,
And angel-spirits hover near,
As the lovers to the feast of love draw nigh
To drink the cup of Paradise
The gods to men have given.

of Ronald and Beatrice.

INTERLUDE.

The Woodland Flower.

A maiden singing:—

*A youth went for adventures forth
Far from the city's grime,
Far from travel's hardened path,
Into the woodland and forest deep.
There came he upon a rare and precious flower.
The flower would he pluck,
And rashly tear the bleeding stem
From its twining rootlets forth.
The petals quivered,
Softly sang the nightingale above:
Heal what thou hast broken
With thy kiss;
Inviolate with thee
Remain the beauty of her soul.*

ACT II. THE SACRED WEDDING.

The Bridal Suite at Castle Ofterdingen.

(Note: In the ancient Thuringian marriage there often was at the conclusion of the public wedding a more sacred wedding in which only the chosen friends of bride and bridegroom participated. There was an arch for the bride to pass through into her new life, an altar to denote her consecration and she also wore a symbolical girdle and a wreath of flowers.)

Part I. Song of the Bridesmaids.

Song addressed the bridegroom, while leading his bride through the bridal arch.

Tenderly now take thy bride.
In thy heart enshrine her,
With thy soul adore her,
Thy queen appoint her,
As the apple of thine eye
Do thou guard her.
Inviolable with thee
Remain the beauty of her soul.

Song addressed to the bride, standing by her lover's side.

To-day though art fair,
Yet on the morrow shalt thou fairer be.
To-day thou art the rosy bud,
To-morrow the unfolding bloom.
Thy crown is now preparing
For the noon-tide sun
Thy morning to eclipse.
Then, O, our sister, as thy lips
The kiss of womanhood receive,
Do thou pray for us,
For to Life's priestess
Of Heaven nothing is denied.
The flowers of thy wreath
Now cast to us
As sacred token
That before twelve moons have passed
We, too, the golden path shall walk.

Part II. Leonore.

LEONORE, Mother, to Beatrice, aside:

Thus of the jewels of the mother-heart
Builds youth its summer-house:
And with lavish hands

Scatters the gems
Of tears and anxious watching
As if it were the sea-shore's sand.
Her that is more than life to me
To him I give:
Yet must not show the trickling tear
And without sign of loss
Renounce my bosom-treasure,
Because a wooer
On her his eye hath cast.
Joy for them her garlands winds
While sorrow beckons me
The dreary path with her to walk.
O motherhood, thou meaning-laden word,
Storehouse of the heart's
Unfathomed treasures,
From doll to wedding-bells,
And thence to children's children,
Thy tortuous emotions
Run the gamut of a woman's heart.
Half joy, half pain:
Yet neither would I miss
For of the higher and the lower chords
Thy soul-deep harmony is wrought.
I knew my spring was past.
Yet in my fancy proudly wore
The summer's bloom upon my brow,
—Since Venice's mirrors
Have not yet tinged my hair with gray—
When Berthelind, my first-born, came,
Drew me aside, and stammered:
"Mother, O Grandmother dear."
Then I heard the toll of autumn leaves,
And bade my quivering heart
Turn to view the setting sun.
I can grow no more,
No longer glad surprises
Are held for me in store.
Hence only can I give:
Nevermore receive.
My joy must be
With others to rejoice,
And from younger faces
Wipe the tears,
Friend, counselor and guide

The Sacred Betrothal

Through life's entangled mazes
Perchance I may yet be:
But actor on the stage
In its enchanted dream?
Not once again.
—Gone are my days of youth.
Ah, for love,
Life is much too short.
'Twas but yesterday
Tiny garments I fashioned
In hope of promises yet unfulfilled.
(With daring I had braved the dawn,
And with a song my eager heart,
If fate had so ordained,
To its execution would have gone.)
But to-day with other feelings
I watch my daughters do the same.
One by one
Are my blossoms plucked
To shine for other eyes.
Soon a branchless tree,
Of its glory shorn,
I stand.
See how he snatches her from me,
And as robber to his lair
He carries her.
And she herself
Bids me welcome
The spoiler of my heart:
For that she has a mother
A bride knows not.
Ah, woman never gives herself alone:
Her own, and her mother's soul,
Both she strews at her lover's feet.

Yet do I acknowledge
That dear to me is Ronald:
Since I of my son,
And he of his mother is bereft.
When first to me
Beatrice brought him in
He grasped my hand and kissed it
And faintly lisped the wonder-word
"Mother" unto me.

of Ronald and Beatrice.

Then tears filled his pleading eye.
I kissed him on the brow
And softly answered, "Son,"
Then left them to each other,
Fled to my room and wept;
For in tears alone the woman-heart
Can gush its fulness forth.

But to-night, not yet
Is the time of tears,
A little longer
Must I steel myself against the floods
That no discord in their joy be heard.
With happy mien will I stand
Till the breaking of all ties is done:
Then will I take my empty heart
And we will weep,
Alone will we weep.

Part III. The Flower-Girls.

YOUNG FLOWER-GIRL (*passing through the bridal arch*):

I know not what I carry,
Nor why upon this altar
These flowers so tremblingly I lay.
My heart, O my heart,
With fear and joy
It flutters strange and full.
I know a youth so fair,
He looked on me the other day;
O what meant his look?
What meant his look?

SECOND FLOWER-GIRL:—

With reverence this flower
From thy bridal girdle
To my breast I pin:
For I am older, sisters, than you think,
My heart is ready,
Pining, ah, for him
Who is my sun.

To my lips this flower I press,
Now do I consecrate myself:
After this no other kiss,
Till he whose right it is
Shall come.

The Sacred Betrothal

OLDER FLOWER-GIRL, *aside*:

O lover mine!
Why dost thou tarry?
Pluck up thy courage
And make bold
To ask of me the question
Which most I dread,
Yet almost dying, long to hear.
O lisp the pregnant word
That shall make me faint and pale
And shake me as an aspen leaf.
To thy arrow
I my heart lay bare.
O ask of me,
And ask enough
That I be no longer free,
But be pledged forever unto thee.

ETHELRIED, *Sister to Beatrice, one of the Brides-
maids*:

I must not, I dare not tell,
Yet silence cannot keep,
Have ever you seen
A face so blushing,
And lips so red as mine?
A girl as a dove so shy
And happy as the lark?
The reason?—
He hath kissed me,
—Much, O much, against my will.—
And I kissed him back
(Against my will).
He clasped me in his arms,
He drew me to his breast,
I said "You must not!"
He drew me closer,
(I could not breathe),
I held him fast,
And kissed once more.
How many followed, I cannot confess:
For you would never believe me
They could be so many,
So sweet and so long.
'Tis our secret,

of Ronald and Beatrice.

For our love is true:
I am happy,
His kiss hath made me so.

A BRIDESMAID, *to herself*:

When for the holy war
From our village he departed,
He took me by the hand:
He pressed it warmly,
Then caressed it,
And looked into my eyes
Down into my heart.
He went,
And never message has he sent me.
O men are fickle,
Men are false.
Perhaps he meant it not,
But my heart is heavy.
He broke the sacred seal,
And kept the key:
I cannot be another's,
Yet he claims me not.

I am forsaken.

In the silent watches of the night
I shed my burning tears,
The vision faileth me,
My hope is dimmed,
My heart is sore.

ROSAMUND, *Beatrice's youngest sister*:

O Beatrice, the dearest of my sisters.
Till Ronald came
All thy heart I possessed.
(Mayhap for thy sake
Do I forgive him).
O the men—

From thy lips
Thy last virgin kiss
Have I come to snatch,
And well-guarded
Will I keep it in my vow
Never to be bound or wed:
For youth's holiday
In the marriage-ring is ended.
Each wedding leaner makes
My comradeship.

The Sacred Betrothal

Berthelind scarce knows me now
Since her baby came
(The sweet little thief)
—She says I do not understand—
And in her happiness
No room for me hath Ethelried,
In a day is she a woman grown:
She romps with me no more.
And, dearest Beatrice,
I know it well,
As to thy lover thou art closer drawn
To me wilt thou colder grow.
I hate the men,
The cause of this
And all of woman's griefs.
I hate them all—
All but One.

BERTHELIND, *Beatrice's married sister, while the bridal
candles and incense are lit, in a whisper:*

O sister dear, the fairest of us four,
Soon at life's altar shalt thou stand
And heaven's blessing claim.
Let me whisper in thy ear
Not to fear
When the dawn of womanhood
Thy being thrills.
Thy lover is an honorable man,
(I've read it in his eye)
Tender and kind,
Strong to rule the unruly realm.
Unwaveringly cast thyself into his trust
And without question
Give as woman gives.
With gladness
Thy treasure shalt thou bear,
The hallowed secret know,
And find thy nature's satisfying,
For the tenderest joy
Of the deepest pain is born.

of *Ronald and Beatrice*.

Part IV. Final Chorus of the Bridesmaids.

(While leaving the bridal bower.)

A bridegroom so handsome,
So manly,
To thy safekeeping
We commit our sister
Spotless as Eve in Paradise
Heaven's perfect handiwork.
With thy strength overshadow her,
With thy life redeem her:
Worthily to thy arms
Receive her! Good-Night.

Chorus of the Flower-Girls.

Flowers red, flowers white,
Flowers young, flowers fresh,
Flowers enchanted, flowers prophesying
At thy feet we strew:
For thy path
Is the path of roses and of lilies:
The mystery that with the rainbow's halo
Shall thy face transform:
For youth's one sweetest hour
Is the bridal hour.—Good-Night.

ACT III. RAGNI, THE OUTCAST.

RAGNI, a former companion of Beatrice and her friends, but now an outcast, has stealthily approached the castle-window, and with her young babe secretly watched the nuptials:

O Beatrice, never canst thou know
How the innocent do suffer.
'Tis well thou thinkest not of me this hour,
For I would not mar thy joy:
Only from afar behold
What for myself I hoped.
Yet each flower in thy wreath
Is to my side a pricking thorn.
I loved so much, so truly,
And trusted so confidently:
I believed him honest as myself.
But he basely left me:
Left me with the pledge
Of woman's crowning-glory:
The babe that now proclaims my shame.

The Sacred Betrothal

Proud as the proudest
By his side would I have walked,
And with my infant shown myself
At every public concourse triumphant
That I am not a woman born in vain.
But, ah, my darling,
How heavily thy father's sins
Do fall upon us!

He forsook me,
Broke the oath he swore me:
Wherefore, O my sisters, ye tread me under
foot.

Ye mock me for my trust,
And hold your skirts aloof from me
As if I were a viper.
With fresh stumbling blocks
Ye daily pave my thorny path.
I am cast off,
Therefore ye declare me fallen.
O for a friendly tear,
A sympathizing heart!
But alas there is no bosom-friend,
Nor boon-companion, nor sister
For her whom her lover wronged.

But for my babe, in part
Ye would forgive me.
—As if the sin were less
That is in secret done.—
Ye know not what I suffer:
Ye know not how I love
This orphan-child, ye call a bastard,
And a child of sin.
Nay, to me 'tis a child of succor,
'Twas born of faith and love,
'Tis my inmost own
Twice am I its mother
Once in the God-appointed pains
And now in persecution.
Why do ye judge so harshly:
The child sinned not,
And I, its mother,
Suffer, as no other mortals suffer.
His father's love hath failed him,
But never faileth
Mother-love and woman's constancy.

of Ronald and Beatrice.

Ah, my fatherless darling,
On what unfriendly shores art thou cast.
The righteous wish thee dead,
The scoffers mark thee as the harlot's child,
And hypocrites hail thee
As the welcome prod
To gash my bleeding heart anew.
Because thy father left us
Must we ever tremble
As the sparrow from the hawk,
And walk with downcast eyes,
And creep about by night,
(For in the sunlight scorners sit)
And ever eat our bread in tears?
O let us heaven's judgment seek,
For surely He that knows it all
Cannot be so unmerciful
As is the world to her
Who loved and was forsaken.
Come, my sleeping darling,
Thy mother never was a bride;
(Unholy hands robbed us of our crown)
Let us end our misery.
'Twas at yonder lake
On a mild autumn night,
The grass was yet green,
The leaves were gold and yellow,
I with my lover sat
(Then still a lover true)
—When heaven our betrothal witnessed.—
There, in the cool waves,
Of that self-same lake
Will we find the soothing of our sorrow.

She seizes her babe and in a fit of despair runs with it to the lake. As she arrives at its shores, the moon stands full above the forest. The babe awakens and opens its eyes.

One last look now, the very last,
Into these sweet blue eyes.
A kiss, then the grewsome murmur of the
waves,
And all is over.
Ah, my babe, thou wert his covenant of love.
In thine eyes I see him once again,

The Sacred Betrothal

His better self is there :
How could he do it?
Warm upon the bed
In another's arms now he lies,
And thou and I, how we suffer
Homeless in the cold!
O God, we come :
In thy mercy this thy child receive.

*(Walks to the brink of the water, but hesitates for
a moment)*

Nay, but thou art his child,
And my heart not wholly closed to him.
—But vain is my hope.—
How have I for thee suffered!
—Still will I suffer—
And uncomplainingly woman's lot
Upon me take:
For to make atonement of man's sin
Was woman born.
Thou art innocent.
—Sacred was the hour—
His baseness I'll forgive
And heaven bless
I thee possess.

of Ronald and Beatrice.

INTERLUDE.

A Bride Adorned for Her
Husband.

A maiden singing:

*Why such infinite pains
For my dress
And my adorning?
'Tis for him.
His joy
Is all my thought and care.
No misplaced lock
Must show hair.
No unsmoothed ruffle
Disclose my dress.
Each one a treasured flower
One more for him
To crush and disarrange.
To the brim would I fill his cup
And rich his spoiling make
For Life's one sweetest hour
Is the Bridal Hour.*

ACT IV. LEGENDARY.

Heaven and Earth United in Love's Holy Hour.

Cupid, Ronald and Beatrice, Nymphs, etc.

I. LOVE'S HOLY HOUR.

CUPID, to the lovers:

When once upon a time
The Lord of Life
A charmed flower would plant,
He did not with lightning rend the sky
And summoned not the giants of the air
With thunder-trumpet forth.
Gentleness he laid upon his mighty strength.
He sought a shaded, dewy spot,
He hushed the storm
And hung Æol's harp
Upon the entrance
Of the foliage-covered bower
Hid from the garish sun.
There in the moist earth
A little root he buried,
And painted green
The broad leaves
Of the jewel's setting.
The flower-bell
He made of purest white,
Gave it a golden heart,
And sent an angel
To hide therein
A maiden-kiss.
So was the lily of the valley made.
Modest, yet in beauty unsurpassed,
Of faith and love and hope
The emblem grows.
So kiss the kiss of youth
As lilies kiss:
And kiss again,
And deeper yet again,
Till ye be no longer twain.

BEATRICE, to herself:

I am nearly faint,
My bosom heaves,
My heart beats fast,

of Ronald and Beatrice.

A virgin I am to the altar led
To be a woman born.

RONALD, *to himself*:

How pure,
How beautiful and lovely,
Is Beatrice, my bride.
How trustful the questioning
Of her eyes!
What lips for kissing made!
Fair art thou as the placid lake,
Thy face of heaven's blue
The perfect mirror.
O may no cloud thy radiance dim
As in awe I take thee to myself
And in thy kisses bathe.

* * *

I dare not look again,
My heart keep still,
The consort of the gods
Is not for thee.

Then to Beatrice, taking her hand and caressing it:

Dearest, dost remember,
When first thou gavest me this hand?
'Twas at my mother's grave,
Thou stood'st beside me there,
'Twas God who led thee there.
In that hour of darkness
Thou came'st a shining star
Across my path.
Thy gentle sympathy brought hope
In hopeless days.
Thou griev'dst with me,
And assuaged'st my grief.
Thy modest dignity entranced my heart.
Sweet were our wooing days.
Sweet the light
Then shining in thine eyes.
I knew thou lovedst me truly,
Yet kep'st thyself a guarded fortress.
But in that hour so holy
When the stars their love-beams twinkle,
And angels from immortal thrones descend

The Sacred Betrothal

To sigh for mortal bliss
Thou didst of me accept thy bridal kiss.
O the thrills and rapture of that kiss!
On this day that thou art wholly mine,
O kiss it to me again
A thousand thousand times.

CUPID, *handing Beatrice Love's magic mirror, revealing her lover:*

BEATRICE, *absorbed in the mirror:*

I always knew my Ronald was a man,
And altogether a man,
Yet far handsomer is he
Than ever I divined.
How erect he stands,
How graceful in his strength,
From head to foot
No blemish upon him anywhere.
No puny, weakling seed
From him can issue.
O Ronald, gladly and undismayed
Is Beatrice thy bride.
O that I had a thousand hearts to give
Instead of one,
And were a goddess now,
Then heaven's lights would I pluck
To weave my lover's crown:
Yet though I gave the day,
And all the brightness of the sky,
'Twere not half I fain would give to thee.

of *Ronald and Beatrice*.

II. ELYSIUM.

The Betrothed Asleep, or in a Dream. The Angel-
Choir, Nymphs, Furies, etc.

Historical.

According to an old Thuringian legend, each undefiled earthly marriage had a heavenly counterpart. It was said that at the instant of the wedded bridegroom's first kiss, the souls of the lovers were transplanted to Heaven by two bridal nymphs, named Nereid and Naiad, who conducted them to the Elysian regions and acted as their guide through the heavenly nuptials.

Antiphonal lightning from the Evening and Morning stars announces to the dwellers in heaven the approach of the Bridal Souls.

SONG OF THE HEAVENLY CHOIR.

Hail to the Holy One,
Hail to the Chosen One,
Hail to the Bride,
The morning-star of Life.

NAIAD, *a nymph, to the Betrothed:*

O Happy mortals,
Who have vowed the vow
Heaven-pleasing,
Earth-redeeming,
Here in Elysium's bowers
Plight your troth anew
That everything on earth begun
In heaven its completion find.

NEREID, *a nymph, to Ronald:*

Consider the jewel that to thee is given,
For thou knowest not
The age-long groaning of the universe,
The yearning, silent brooding
Of the Spirit
Till from chaos
Woman's beauty did arise:
Nor how in agonies untold
And blindly groping,
Ever upward striving,
Ever thwarted, devious paths
Compelled to wander,
Seeking light

And never the veil of darkness
Fully piercing,
Thirsting after truth,
And still unquenched remaining:
O in what birth-throes
Is perfection born!
—'There she stands,
Heaven's glory, now thy bride.

RONALD, *upon beholding a vision of Beatrice:*

O Beatrice, my bride,
How spotlessly thy robe of innocence
Thy hidden worth proclaims.
Thy eyes, thy lips, thy hair
Betray the sapphire-glow within.
How marvelous the soul
That such an habitation
For its dwelling framed!
Thy skin so white;
Thy crimson blush
As roses in the morning-dew.
Thy arms a Goddess lent thee,
Thy hands the Graces kissed,
Thy loins in Beauty's curves enclosed,
Thy feet with angel sandals shod:
Thou art the queen of heaven
And fairer than the fair,
Never eyes have seen such comeliness
As can with thee compare.

CUNINA, *the disconsolate nymph of heaven, approaches to conduct the lovers to Fensalir, where they are to drink the Cup of Immortality.*

(Note: It is said that Cunina always took unusual interest in the affairs of men. Once she witnessed the blush of a maiden at her first kiss and at another time came upon a young mother at play with her babe. She believed that here she saw happiness unknown in heaven. Thereafter she ever remained disconsolate.)

CUNINA, *to the lovers:*

I have dwelt on earth
And seen its sorrows,
Beheld its pains
And mourned the desolation
That from human sin leaps forth:
Yet love for all is compensation,

of *Ronald and Beatrice.*

The healing balm for deepest wounds.
We here are called the Blest:
We have no night,
And hence know not the morning thrill.
Here, where we never grow old,
We were never young.
We, that weep not at the grave,
Can never feel the cradle-smile
Tugging at the mother-heart
And where there is no sorrow
Rejoicing hath but half its worth.
O, for an hour of youth and love
I would exchange my changeless bliss
And count not death
Too high a price
To gain a lover's kiss.
And if over love that is lost
I must mourn
The bitter-sweetness
Still is sweet.

(Secretly Cunina now binds the lovers with the silver-chord of love to unchanging faithfulness. Furies in the background mutter their curses, but are not distinctly heard by human ears.)

FIRST FURY, *to the lovers:*

Bride and bridegroom
Say ye that ye are,
And in one short hour would quaff
The happiness
Of all eternity's distilling.
O heedless sons of men,
Heaven's greatest gift
Far too lightly do ye judge.
Never to Fensalir shall ye pass
Till ye swear
With your souls forever to pay
The penalty of faithlessness.

THE FURIES, *in chorus:*

And if ye break your vows
We will rend your heart
And blind your eyes
And sink you into the vortex of hell,

The Sacred Betrothal

We will, we will.

CUNINA, *sadly*:

*And the innocent
Shall suffer more than the guilty.*

SECOND FURY, *to Ronald*:

And I will scatter thy youth,
And shatter thy hopes,
And the death-knell
In thy marrow rattle.

CUNINA:

*And the innocent
Shall suffer more than the guilty.*

THIRD FURY, *to Beatrice*:

And with the furrows
Of sorrow
Will I mar thy face.
And for repentance
There shall be no room
In thy doom.

CUNINA:

*And the innocent
Shall suffer more than the guilty.*

(Tremblingly Beatrice seeks shelter in Ronald's arms, who stoops to caress her, whereupon, since love is stronger than fear, the Furies vanish.)

CUNINA, *to Beatrice*:

O happy daughter of earth,
Heaven's goldenest path
Dost thou tread.
With thee to thy joy
We may not enter.
Thy consecration
Is to us denied:
For we are vestals only,
But thou of Life
The sacred shrine itself.
(The lovers enter Fensalir.)

THE HEAVENLY CHOIR:

*And God saw the works
Which he had made
And behold, they were very good.*

of Ronald and Beatrice.

III. FENSALIR, THE TEMPLE OF IMMORTALITY.

The lovers asleep, agitated by dreams and visions.

RONALD (*in a dream*), to Beatrice:

O Beatrice, queen of my heart,
Surpassing fair thou art.
Heaven's radiance is upon thy brow,
And fairies in the silver-spray
Are thy roseate image tracing.
Give me thy lips again
That I may swear my soul anew to thee.
To the awe of angels let us go,
Love's sealing there receive
And our completer self attain.
At thy being's solemn quiver
I will near thee stand.

BEATRICE (*in a dream*), to herself:

How strange is Love!
How deep its mysteries!
Who is worthy
Life's secret springs to touch
And drink the resurrection-kiss?

Hera, the Goddess of Health, enters and presents the
Cup of Immortality to the Lovers:—

This is the Cup of Immortality,
Take each your chalice,
And drink of it.
—Then self with self exchange—
And press it to each other's lips,
And from the self-same spot
The other drank
Quaff it to the end
Till soul in soul dissolve:
For in the bridal blush to glow
Is creation's final, perfect end.

*The echo of the Heavenly Choir is heard in the
portals of Fensalir:*

*What in heaven
God hath joined to-gether,
Let not man
Asunder part.*

The Sacred Betrothal

RONALD (*in a vision*), to Beatrice, while drinking with
her the immortal cup:

O Beatrice, bride of brides,
With wealth untold
In thee love's kingdom is endowed.
I gaze into thine eyes:
I drink thy soul,
—Do thou drink mine,—
'Tis heaven itself—O more than heaven—
I wed thee to an everlasting kiss,
I am of thee—O happiness of happiness—
And thou of me, forever and forever,
Each other's love-kissed other self.

*From Adnir, at the foot of the rainbow, out of the
abyss of the Unborn, whose bonds only maiden-hands
can loosen, prayer ascends to Beatrice's ears:*

From out of the shadowy deep,
From the timeless gloom
And fetters of night,
For our deliverance,
O maiden, we plead with thee.
Our unformed beings pity:
O give us the dawn:
With thyself our hunger still,
And of the rainbow weave us
Childhood's garment
Of laughter and frolicsome days.
Thy prayers teach our lips,
And softly sing thy speech our mother-tongue.
Sow freely of thy heart's aspiring
Reap in us thy harvest of hope,
And out of our helplessness
Build thee the fairest castle
Of thy soul.

BEATRICE, *sings softly*:

Tiny blossoms
Praying for the morning sun,
Tiny hands
By mother-yearning answered,
Tiny tears
By tenderest pity dried:
Heaven's flowers
I water with my hands.

INTERLUDE.

The Maiden at Her Devotions.

A maiden singing:

*When at eventide
At my bedside
I bend my knees,
All evil from me flees.
In the confessing tear
My God draws near.
O blessed hour of prayer,
How sweet to linger
In thy fragrant air,
Where bloom the flowers
Of the morning-sun.*

ACT V. EUNICE, THE UNWOODED.

Scene: After the wedding. Eunice, a bridesmaid,
in her bed-chamber.

EUNICE, *sitting upon her bed, partly disrobed, toying
with the flowers from the bridal girdle:*

How becomingly did this girdle
The princess Beatrice encircle!
How proud she looked
When so tenderly
Ronald did unloosen it!
How beautiful to be a bride,
O how I long—
'Tis woman's glory,
'Tis her all.

Was I a woman born
To be denied my right?
And shall my nature
Never reach its full intoxication?
Nor never know its rightful pangs?
And never taste the joy
That lies beyond the mortal agony?
Shall I never minister my infant's wants,
No darling carry on my breast?
O who damns me so to fail
Of my destiny:
That childless, unloved

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